<Book Reviews>Samson Lim. Siam's New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016, viii+213pp.

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in Japan (in contrast to other places that are currently facing limited institutional support due to budget cuts), and young scholars are encouraged to contribute their research and expertise in many different fields and in national/local/vernacular languages in the region, not solely in English. As such, this book illustrates how (foreign) scholars can help initiate, facilitate, and foster fruitful dialogues, including on topics that are still controversial, as part of their common interest to develop an active network of communities of learners in the region.

G30S dan Asia is an interesting volume that opens up a new field of study on the 1965 coup in the context of international politics in the region, under the Cold War situation. It is a must-read volume for every young Indonesian to look into and understand his/her nation's troubled history beyond the official narrative.

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Siam's New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand

SAMSON LIM

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2016, viii+213pp.

Bearing the hallmarks of a fine PhD thesis, Samson Lim's *Siam's New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand* contributes fresh perspectives, information, and analysis on the still under-studied police force in Thailand. The police play an important role in Thailand, not just in managing crime but as political actors. From the police force's early days as a Bangkok-based constabulary, established in 1860, Lim tells of a reorganization, the founding of a provincial gendarmerie, and expansion and modernization (pp. 24–33). His book takes us through an account of the police and its investigative techniques as it became the CIA's preferred agency and armed to the teeth in the early 1950s, while also discussing some aspects of the police up to the early twenty-

first century. His attention is largely on the investigative methods learned and adopted by the police and how they "visualized" crime and, in some cases, manufactured crimes, suspects, and confessions. The book is organized into five chapters, together with an introduction and conclusion.

In the introduction Lim begins with the story of Sherry Ann Duncan, a Thai-American teenager abducted and murdered in 1986. Four men were arrested, pressed to "reenact" their "crime," and convicted in 1990, on the evidence of a witness. Sentenced to death, the four were eventually released in 1993 by a Supreme Court that ruled on the lack of corroborating evidence. While in prison one defendant died, another was crippled, and a third contracted a disease that would eventually kill him. Then, in 1996, a court convicted another three men of Duncan's murder. They, too, were made to reenact the crime based on the evidence of the very same witness used by the police in the first trial. This time, the witness gave details about a completely different crime scene. Before each trial this witness was tutored by the police, who decided what his statement should say (pp. 1–2). As Lim notes, this is not a particularly unusual case (p. 2). Indeed, while I was reading Lim's book, there were similar cases reported in the Bangkok media. For example, in March 2017 it was widely reported that a man had been sentenced to 21 years in jail for a robbery where the police "witnesses" were 7- and 11-year-old boys. More than a decade after the crime, fellow prison inmates confessed to being the real robbers. Clearly, the police had manufactured this unfortunate man's conviction.

The book concentrates on explaining how the police are trained to investigate crimes and is focused on the various investigative methods used, concentrating on visual representations, including fingerprints, maps, and sketches to photographs and reenactments (p. 3). Lim engages in a postmodern assessment of this, replete with questions of how "facts" are created—he argues that they gain their "facticity [*sic*] from aesthetic rules . . ." (p. 3)—and how these visual representations become a means for generating "new information" as the police contemplate these representations (p. 4). Lim argues that by "acknowledging the productive nature of images, in addition to their symbolic functions, one can see that policing is fundamentally an interactive, creative endeavor as much as a disciplinary one" (pp. 8–9). This interaction and its manipulation mean the "deployment of state violence is seen as justified, desirable, and necessary" in society (p. 9).

Chapter 1 discusses the historical development of policing. The author argues that the inauguration and growth of the police force was in response to elite concerns about crime in a rapidly developing Bangkok that was a "ramshackle, transient place" (p. 12) where crime was identified as a "problem" (pp. 16–24). He shows that the police and bureaucracy were ill prepared to deal with rising crime, and this resulted in bureaucratic reform and increased training for the police. As the force developed, the public got to know it, and the police and public developed "a set of routines to help them make sense of the noise of daily life, to come to grips with the violence and crime that plague Thai society" (p. 33).

Yet, as the author observes, although force was outlawed in 1895, it was not unusual for police

officers and civilian officials to use force in extracting confessions. Lim says that beating confessions from suspects "was still employed well into the 1920s and 1930s (and some would say is still today)" (p. 29). The parenthetic comment is unnecessary ambivalent; numerous authoritative reports have shown that the police and military regularly use beatings and torture against detainees and suspects.

Chapter 2 is an account of how the police force began to modernize and develop its "sets of routines" for investigating crimes, mainly examining the early part of the twentieth century. This is a story of the development of an "ostensibly scientific" approach to investigation (p. 35), involving statistics, photography, fingerprints, crime and crime scene reports, and other scientific investigation techniques. All these techniques needed to be taught to police and trainees, and Lim carefully details the ways in which this was handled, relying mainly on the manuals developed for the purpose. This chapter is insightful and carefully developed. My lingering question relates to the relationship between the police and the broader justice system, including the judiciary and the prison system, which is not addressed by the author.

In Chapter 3 Lim turns to "mapping," relating the ways in which the police were trained not just to delineate space but how to constantly monitor and surveil it. While Lim introduces the chapter with a promise to indicate how preemptive violence by the state is justified, he does not fully deliver, being sidetracked into a discussion of cosmology.

Chapter 4 sees the author returning to the reenactment of crimes, first mentioned in the discussion of the Duncan murder. While these probably began in the 1920s (p. 89), Lim focuses on the relationship that developed between the police and the press, mediated by these performances. Lim dates the relationship to the early 1950s, involving photographs and later film and video coverage of crime reenactments. Given that these usually take place after a suspect's confession has been obtained, both the police and public tend to view reenactments as accurate and perhaps even cathartic. In this relationship, the police can also manipulate perceptions. The current military regime in Bangkok has been especially manipulative. It is no surprise to see police parade the regime's political opponents, dressing them up and telling them how to behave, pointing weapons, and so on (see *Bangkok Post*, September 14, 2014). The confession and reenactment are mutually reinforcing "evidence" when suspects are taken to trial. A "freely given" confession more or less guarantees a conviction (p. 93). So important is the confession that courts provide an incentive to suspects, tending to halve jail time for those who confess. For the police, the way to demonstrate to the court that a confession was not coerced is to have the suspect reenact the crime (p. 95). That the press likes a good crime story means that reenactments are mutually beneficial for media and police (p. 105).

This attention to the public naming and shaming of those who have confessed accords with other efforts to maintain the impunity enjoyed by the authorities when they are involved in extrajudicial killings. It is not uncommon for such murders to be waved away as a "bad person" getting

their "proper" punishment (p. 103). In recent years, southern Malay Muslims and alleged drug users and traffickers have met this fate, with the authorities smearing the disappeared and those who die in custody as "violent separatists" or "drug traffickers" (see Wassana 2017).

Lim begins Chapter 5 with the observation that "conspiracy theory" has become a "governing rubric or narrative architecture" that "endures to shape the way in which Thais interpret current events" (p. 114). In this chapter Lim argues that this "unfortunate situation," an "entrenched cynicism and general air of suspicion," is directly linked to the Cold War and the "brutal deployment of physical force by competing agents of the Thai state" (p. 114). He details the aid to police provided by the United States and has data on the huge expansion of numbers and weaponry this permitted as the police developed paramilitary capabilities. Lim details several events that he considers conspiracies, from the shooting death of King Ananda in 1946, on the wrong end of a US-supplied weapon, to recent "visualizations" of alleged anti-monarchy conspiracies. Lim concludes that the conspiracies were neither spontaneous nor natural. Rather, he says, they resulted from a "deliberate program of misrepresentation . . ." (p. 133) designed for political purposes and a "strategy of elites against their enemies, real and perceived" (p. 134).

In his conclusion, the author returns to his theoretical concerns and his emphasis on images, noting that visual representations can take many forms and can have multiple functions and readings. In essence, images and their uses are socially and politically constructed. Images and words may help people to make sense of the world, but they may also be used to concoct a reality for readers and viewers. Lim makes these points succinctly, and aside from some lapses into postmodern language manufacture, his summing up is well written. At the same time, this reader felt somewhat disappointed when some of the cases mentioned in the text, including the Sherry Ann Duncan and King Ananda cases, were left as mysteries. But then, much that the Thai police do lacks transparency and is as illegal as the crimes investigated. How such a huge force is so remarkably opaque, inept, and corrupt remains a mystery.

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